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Van Spyker, Edwin and Goldie Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

Tracy Bednarick

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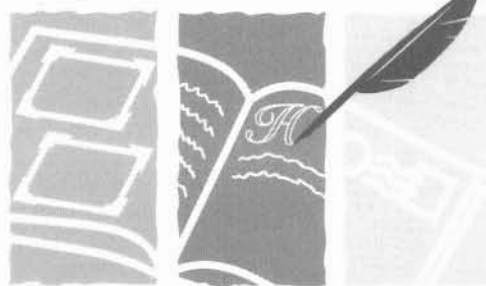
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The Hope College Oral History Project for 1996
The Joint Archives of Holland

Interview #10

Mr. Edwin and Mrs. Goldie Van Spyker
Holland's Past Fifty Years

Conducted by:
Tracy Bednarick
July 3, 1996

Abstract (topics appear in a general order of appearance in paper): Door to door delivery, grocery stores of the early 1900s, The Interurban, Mrs. Van Spyker's history, visitors from the Netherlands, Dutch names, childhood, killing English Sparrows for money, winter in Holland, family, Fairview Park in Saugatuck, DeGraaf Nature Center, Sundays, WWI and WWII, career in the heating business, dray lines, changes, high taxes relative to where you live, more winter, chores, church, Dutch and Tulip Time, acceptance of differences in Holland, The Depression, big industry in Holland, The Streetcar, old drugstores, Hope College, and Crime.

Interviewees: Edwin (EVS), and Goldie Van Spyker (GVS), long-time residents of Holland, Michigan.

Interviewer: Tracy Bednarick (TLB), oral history student coordinator.

[Recording starts after interview has already begun. Mr. Van Spyker had just begun to speak about what his early years were like in Holland.]

EVS: We had iceboxes. You got ice every day, except Saturday. *(The following section

incased in brackets was included after the interview, during the transcribing process.)

[We had ice boxes. They would get their ice from a storage building. One was at 16th Street, near the end of Montello Park. It belonged to Mr. Bremer. Another one was on the North side of the lake. They would cut the ice in the winter on Black Lake (Now Macatawa Lake.) The ice was 15" to 18" thick or more. Each man out there had a long saw (about 6' long) with coarse teeth. Standing up with a handle on one end of the saw, we would cut the ice on the lake into squares maybe 20" or 24" and whatever the thickness of the frozen part of the lake was. They would bring the chunks of ice to the storage warehouse for next summer. People had ice boxes and later in about 1920, or 1930 when electric refrigerators came in the ice business collapsed. Mr. Bremer, and others also sold coal in the between time. Last number of yours we haven't had ice on the lake in great quantities like that anymore. It was really interesting to watch those men cart ice.

Another man would come around ever Saturday with a nice heavy tank, and they sold buttermilk. Another would deliver kerosene for every day, but Sunday. We had all these things like that. Before that a grocery-man would come one day; he would take the order and then the next day he would bring the groceries. Then the A&P came in. [Mrs. VanSpyker enters room.] You can come in if you want.

GVS: You didn't say who was here.

TLB: You are more than welcome to join in, if you like.

GVS: I have a couple things that I have to finish. [leaves room]

EVS: Any way, they came in and all the other stores were soon gone. But anyway when I was at Longfellow school in about fifth or sixth grade, this lady next to the school hall asked me to go once week to the A&P Store. I would take my cart and go down to the A&P store to buy groceries for her. Everybody did that. That is what I did while I was in school.

TLB: To make a little extra money?

EVS: Yeah, to make a little bit of money. Not a lot, but a little bit. Of course, a little bit at that time was a lot. The meat markets downtown, Phernenboke, DeKracker & Dekoster, Malenaar & DeGood, plus another on 8th which I can't quite remember the name. There was also one on Eighth Street, the name which I have forgotten now. They all went down. They got undermined.

TLB: When the A&P came in.

EVS: Yes, they gradually worked out. Then C. Thomas came in, and Kroger came in, later. Both of those stores went out; Kroger was the one over here on Washington and 30th Street. The building is still for lease out there. It has been for years and years empty. That is part of it. We went for work around the house and things like that.

Saturday night the folks used to take us downtown, and we would go to an ice cream parlor. That was the big treat of the week. There were three or four of them. There was Fabiano's, and a couple of other ones there. Those were some of the

things that we did when we were kids.

Another thing that we had was the Interurban. This was an electric railroad that came from Grand Rapids, to Holland, to Saugatuck. Gertrude's father was a motorman on that Interurban. In order to visit anybody we would take the Interurban, like to go to Grand Rapids. The grandparents lived in Drenthe; that is about eight miles east of here. We would get off at Vriesland. Then we would two miles from Vriesland to Drenthe. In the winter time that was bitter, bitter cold that was quite a walk.

TLB: I bet.

EVS: A couple times my mother had to stop on the way in by some neighbor to sit down a few minutes, and then we would keep going. That is where we went. Her mother's folks lived in Grand Rapids, so we would take the street car to go to Grand Rapids and visit them.

She had a French name. You probably heard about these too. Anyway, before 1802 the Dutch didn't have last names.

TLB: Oh!

EVS: You didn't know that?

TLB: I didn't know that. I'm not Dutch, so I don't know these things.

EVS: Oh, that's okay. She is Irish too. [In reference to his wife, Goldie.] Anyway, they didn't have last names. Napoleon conquered the Netherlands. Some of these French soldiers married these Dutch girls. Those people have French names. The other ones, the Huguenots came about that time. Those kids also have French names. So

my mother had a French name. We never found out what it meant. When they came over here they translated Pouwre to Power like it would be in Holland. My great-grandparents came from what we thought was Drenthe, because they lived in Drenthe. Then we had these people come about ten or fifteen years ago, a group from the Netherlands. About forty or fifty people. We take them around to old cemeteries in the country. They can tell you that every name meant something. We are Van Spyker, and that is a barn carpenter; the man that put the "spykes" in the beam. I talked to a lady the other day who is something like Essenberger, which means east of the bridge. That is where they lived. All the other names work something like that. Graafschaap is sheep pasturer. We should have written those things down. Those people told us that. We went to Western Drenthe Cemetery and pointed out all these different names. They could tell from the names just exactly what these people did.

TLB: That is amazing.

EVS: It is really. But to us, if it said Skipper that is all we would know about. But they could tell you just what that meant then. We can't do it anymore, we are too old. But they do still come out every year, forty or fifty of them. When we were there, one of them took the daughter along, who could speak English. She translated a lot of that stuff for us. There was cemetery north-west of Zeeland. That was one of them way out in the country, all over grown. The one on East 32nd Street, behind somebody's house. All these old cemeteries. West Drenthe that we did most of it, it was about three miles on this side of Drenthe. From that cemetery, they had all those names. The city attorney in Zeeland, Dubisac, it means dirty ditch. The lived by the

drainage canal. There name means dirty ditch. All thing like that. All these different names have this meaning.

The kids would play around school. There was a creek, that we used to dam up on Cherry Street, so that we could go swimming in there. We would do that, then the block down on 22nd Street, there was a farmer, a vegetable grower. He used that water for sprinkling and we cut him off. He would come down there about an hour later, and come break the dam so he could get water again. We used to do a lot of swimming and monkeying in that water there. Building dams and getting in there and monkeying around like that.

Another thing that we did for money, at that time the state had a bounty up for English Sparrows, we got two cents a head for that. At night, eight o'clock or nine o'clock, we would go to the shoe factory which was one of the big places. There was a shoe factory on 15th Street then. This factory had all these vines on the side of the building full of these sparrows there. You could knock them down without scarring them. You twist the head off and then we would bring them to the City Treasurer's office. We would have a whole bag. If you caught fifty of them, you get a whole dollar. We had all nice little thing like that.

TLB: Whatever works.

EVS: Sure, and that is where I got spending money. At that time, Lake Macatawa went almost all the way up to River Avenue, by Fifth Street. There was an old tug there, and we used to go fishing on the back of that tug. The back end was in the water, and the front end was on land. Later, where Pine Avenue is that is all filled in land.

That made the lake smaller. Before that, the lake when almost up to River Avenue.

TLB: I didn't know that.

[Discussion concerning interviewer's nationality.]

TLB: What was winter like in Holland?

EVS: Christmas was a big thing in Holland. We had a lot of Christmas trees and so on.

We always went to a relative of ours on West 17th Street. We would go there every Christmas, and they would come to our house every New Year's. We did that for years and years. The kids grew up, and we did everything like that. In fact, I saw one of the great grandsons the other day. Talked to him. That was the big thing of the years, to go to Warehams. They had a nice big dinner for us on Christmas. And we would fix a nice big one on New Year's when they come.

TLB: Did you have brothers or sisters?

EVS: I had a brother and a sister. The brother died about three years ago. We have a nasty habit, every Saturday morning we go to McDonald's Restaurant. Whomever can come comes over there, and we have coffee together. My sister is one of them that comes over. The daughters, and another couple. That is the only time we see my sister, really. She lives in Holland, and they had a gas station across the lake, just across the bridge on River Avenue. They had a restaurant there.

TLB: What was the name of restaurant?

EVS: Schulling. A realtor is there now. Just beyond that, up the hill, there was a railroad station, Kronze. That is where the trains came from Waverly. One train would go up to Muskegon and Pentwater. The other one would split off at the "Y" and go to

Ottawa Beach. That is when the trains went to Ottawa Beach, yet. The streetcar went to Macatawa Park. My wife's father was a motorman in that. And that is how they happened to come to Holland in the first place. They lived on 13th Street, where the library is now. When she was a young girl, they had a switch up on a box on pole. It was an electric switch. Rather than for her dad to get out of the train and stop the train, he would motion to her, and she would flip that switch. Then they would go on again. That is part of it. The other part of it was that he would pick her up sometime, and then drop her off over here Lugers, and she would pick strawberries. And then they would go down to Saugatuck, and then on the way back he would pick her up in the strawberry fields. This slanted street over there [points], that is where the railway came through there, the electric railroad. It went a few blocks down, and then it went on down to Virginia Park. At Virginia Park they had the car barns, where they fixed the streetcars. Then it went on to Macatawa, then it turned around. Their was a pier out there, and then on Sunday nights the street car would go way out there, and then a boat would come out there. People would get off the street car, and on to the boat to go to Chicago. Then it would go on back through here through Saugatuck.

Just recently they took one of those waiting rooms, and rebuilt out there in Fairview Park, on the way to Saugatuck. It is a new park that they just put in. They used one of the waiting rooms of the old Interurban, just as a mark. It is a real nice little thing like that. It is really old, fifty-some odd years old, but they put new boards on it and fixed it all up. They made it nice looking little job of it. That is

that new park over there. The new county park. It is mostly wild woods over there, but for kids it is wonderful. We have this DeGraaf Nature Center here, all those kids all come by from Lakewood School to go to DeGraaf Nature Center. The teachers all have to keep in line. It is interesting to see all these kids go by to go to the Nature Center. It is a really interesting place.

TLB: Did you have a lot of people that visited Holland, when you where a child?

EVS: Yes, because all of our relatives where from out of town. They came from Drenthe, Vriesland, but mostly Grand Rapids. One of my uncles, my father's brother, worked for a furniture factory in Grand Rapids. They sold pilot light gas stoves. Gas stoves with tanks on them. This man was a service man, he, his wife, and his would come down quite often to visit us from Grand Rapids. They would come more often than anybody else, I think. He would come when he had to go to Macatawa Park, or Saugatuck. He would drop his wife and son off at our house, then he would go do whatever he had to do, and then come back and pick them up. In the summer time, sometimes I would stay at their house, in Grand Rapids, for a couple of weeks. He would go to all these places in the country to take care of the gas stoves. Young and Chaffee, the company isn't there anymore, but it was one of the big furniture stores downtown, once upon a time. The other people were VanderJagt, a butcher, they had a shop in Grand Rapids. The other one was Rosema, my mother's sister's husband. He worked for the elevator company. He would travel around to different places and sell elevators and service them. They came to our house quite a bit. They would stop in whenever they were in the neighborhood.

TLB: Do you remember people saying that the city of Holland was different than other cities?

EVS: Yes, they did. Especially on Sunday. It was really quiet on Sundays. It was different.

TLB: What did you do as a kid on Sundays?

EVS: Nothing, really. We sat around the house. Sunday, in the summertime, we had church service on the lawn. Sometimes in the fall too, but mostly in the summer time. We had two church services: one in the morning, and one in the evening. We didn't do much on Sundays, just sit around and play.

TLB: What year were you born in?

EVS: 1909.

TLB: What was it like during the first World War in Holland?

EVS: It was a busy place. I remember when they had the First Armistice. The had one about three days ahead of the rest. I remember we were kids then. The neighbors had carpenters working, the city told us that because of the war and the scarcity of labor that is way the wages were so high. We went over there at about eleven o'clock after they announced on the radio that the war was over; we went to these people and told them that. We said, "They are going to reduce your wages now." We didn't know what we were talking about, but that is what he said that the wages were high. So we thought that since the war was over, the wages should go down. For that part of it.

TLB: Do you remember how the community reacted to the end of the war?

EVS: They had a big parade downtown.

TLB: What about World War II, what was that like in Holland?

EVS: That was a lot of people gone. I was called, but I didn't have to go, because I was married then. A lot of them did have to go to the service. We had another big parade that night, when the war was over. It did make things hard to get. People couldn't do this and that, because they couldn't get help. [Goldie enters the room.]

GVS: You were talking about the Interurban? Did you tell her that my dad was a motorman on that? And that is why we moved to Holland. Because he came from Grand Rapids to Holland, and then out to the banks of Macatawa and Saugatuck.

TLB: So you lived in Grand Rapids for awhile?

GVS: No, I never did. I was born here.

TLB: But he lived in Grand Rapids, then moved to Holland.

GVS: He moved here because of his work on the Interurban.

EVS: See, her folks came from Ada, that is east from Grand Rapids, where the Amway is now, between Ada and Cascade. That is where here folks came from, originally, out that way.

TLB: What was it like after World War II, when people started coming back from the War?

EVS: There were a lot of people getting together. We had people coming to our house. People that had been in the war, we had them over for dinner, and this, that, and the other thing. They came over to talk about. This one guy, John Goodblood, who was my mother's cousin, he came from Grand Rapids. He was a soldier in Russia. He talked about what happened in Russia, and how people lived over there, how poor

they were, and everything else.

TLB: You were married before World War II? What year were you married?

EVS: 1938.

TLB: What was your job?

EVS: We were in the heating business. When I was younger, before they had cars, I would help my dad do things. One of the things that I did, the boat would come in bringing in water heaters. I would pick those up, after school. We had a cart, 4' by 7', with about 4 foot wheels. You have probably never seen one, but that is what we had before we had a truck. I would go in and pick up stuff, and take it where he was going to work tomorrow. I would put that there. At that time, there were at least three dray lines in Holland. These were truckers. One of them was my dad's cousin. For the furnace, the heavy part, his trucker would come bring that, and deliver those parts to that house for us. One of them was Citizen Transfer and Storage, which is downtown now. That started out as a dray line. When we had to go out into the country, we didn't have a way to get there. We did have livery stables in Holland. At least three of them. The one we went to was 18th and River. We would get a horse, and a cutter or a buggy for a day. We would go work out in the country and then come back and bring it back at night. We did this, because we didn't have a horse. In 1926, we got our first truck. Then we could do things like that. Before that, we had to make do with the livery stable.

TLB: What did the people that delivered the heavy stuff use to deliver it?

EVS: All by hand. All this heavy stuff. And the furnaces too weighed about 1,000

pounds. They were in pieces, but altogether that is how much they weighed.

TLB: You used horses to take it from place to place.

EVS: Harry Spyker did that for us. Damson, and Harry Spyker, and Citizen Transferring were the dray lines. Where there more trade lines than that? Damson on West 9th Street, Citizen Transfer on 8th Street, and Harry Spyker was East Seventeenth and College. I don't remember if there were anymore, but those were the three.

TLB: Do you want to talk about some of the changes that have happened in Holland?

EVS: Yes! A lot of changes. All these fast food places came in, and everything. It was all new. We went to a lot of restaurants, because we did a lot of work in Grand Haven. It would be bitter cold, and then at noon we would go to a restaurant to eat and warm up too! That is a big change, the restaurants. People never used to go to the restaurant very much.

TLB: What about jobs, are jobs different than they used to be?

EVS: My dad at one time worked at a foundry, that was the Holland Furnace Company. That was a big outfit, once upon a time for jobs. He was a molder there. He made sand forms and then they put hot melted iron in there and melted it in the fire pots, and so on. That is what he did for the furnace company.

TLB: Do you remember what it was like when Holland Furnace Company went out of business?

EVS: It was a sick feeling, because they had a lot of people here. They had a lot of close-outs. We bought some office desks, and file cabinets, and stuff when they went out. What was the name of the man who ran Holland Furnace company down to nothing?

He lived out there.

GVS: I can't remember.

EVS: Anyway, he was married to one of the girls of Landwehr. He took the place over, and they did crooked business. That put them out of business. He was out there to make money, and that is all he wanted to do. It ruined the company.

GVS: I bet you were thinking of Ted Cheff.

EVS: Yes, that is it.

TLB: He is the one who took over the company.

EVS: Yes, when he got a hold of it, it went downhill gradually till it was nothing.

GVS: Did you tell her why we happen to be living here? We were living at lake at Central Park. The taxes went up, up, up. And the house got bigger, and bigger. I couldn't keep up with it anymore.

TLB: Do you miss living by the lake?

GVS: Yes, it is beautiful.

EVS: Now is there Bosch over here on South Shore Drive. He died; his had thirty rooms in it, so now it is going to be up for sale.

TLB: Who is going to buy a thirty room house?

EVS: Well they are mostly small rooms. One is like a beauty parlor. It is not really suited a big family, but it is a nice house over here.

TLB: Do you have any suggestions as to why the taxes went up?

EVS: Politicians.

GVS: Yes, all kinds of reasons.

EVS: School taxes, and all sorts. When we lived on Cherry Street year ago, it was a lot less for the taxes there.

TLB: Do you think that there is more of a demand for houses now?

EVS: Yes there is. So many people moving in from out of town. That is why there is such a big demand. Most of the houses sell pretty fast.

GVS: When we were looking for houses, we came down South Shore on morning, and there was a "for sale" sign pointing this way. I said, "Oh Ed, let's look there. It is near the lake."

TLB: It really isn't that far.

EVS: We looked at a lot of houses. By that Saturday afternoon we had bought it.

GVS: The crowning feature for me was that the street car used to go right through those woods there and behind that white house. [Points out window.]

TLB: Is there still a trail there where it went through?

EVS: No, the Board of Public Works put power lines on it.

TLB: What about some of the other changes that have happened in Holland?

EVS: The biggest thing is the automobile. It changed everything around. People could live out farther. Before that, like with Church, people would come in with their horse and buggy. Pretty nearly every church had a stable behind it. They would put the horses there during the service. After the automobiles came, they didn't have to use those. Most of them were made into Boy Scout rooms. Now they are all gone, but at that time when the auto came it put the stables out then.

TLB: They made the stables into Boy Scout rooms?

EVS: Yes, it gave the kids a place to work. Boy Scouts have kind of gradually gone out too. They don't do much anymore.

TLB: Do you have children?

EVS: Two.

TLB: What was it like raising your children in Holland?

EVS: We lived on 13th Street, right off of River, by the Library. When one daughter was one and half years old, she had polio. That changed everything around. She had a year and a half in the hospital in Grand Rapids. Then she got back, and play was different. We had a tricycle for her. We welded the legs so that one foot went higher than the other, because one foot was better than the other one. Now, fifty years later, she runs around with one of these walkers. Otherwise, yes, the kids played in the neighborhood when they were small.

TLB: Did polio hit pretty hard in Holland?

EVS: No, not too bad. It hit around the country, but not too many in Holland.

TLB: Oh, I remember reading some newspapers from early times in Holland, and it was talking about it.

EVS: We had some. But not a lot. About thirty or forty years later there was a reoccurrence, but they had a vaccination at that time.

GVS: They didn't have that then.

EVS: No, not for Cherry, no. When she was there, there was a nurse from Australia who came to the hospital.

GVS: Sister Kenny.

EVS: Yes, she experimented with her. She got it a lot better than some of them with polio.

TLB: Like helped her move?

EVS: Yes, with crutches and such. That is right.

TLB: What were some activities that you did with your family?

EVS: One of the big ones, was on the Fourth of July, one of the boat steamers would go from here to Benton Harbor. That was the highlight of the year. There were five boats that came to Holland: City of Grand Rapids, City of Saugatuck, City of Benton Harbor, and Saint Jo, I think. The biggest one was, City of Grand Rapids, we would go on that boat on the fourth of July for a day. We would go down to St. Jo. or Benton Harbor, and have a picnic, and then come back. That was the big occasion. Then on others, like Christmas, would be the streetcar.

TLB: Early on in Holland, what were some of the things that you did for the winter for snow removal, and how did you get to school?

EVS: Snow removal just was a shovel. Quite often school shut down. I can remember in 1935, the roads were closed. My brother worked for a transfer company, and they couldn't get trucks to go to Grand Haven, because the roads were so bad. We had a lot of snow, and we had to shovel it all out. There were no power shovels or anything like that.

TLB: Was there ever a really bad winter that you recall?

EVS: About 1918, that was one of the bad ones. 1975, was another one. That one was really bad, especially when they shut the roads and everything up. At that they also closed the schools quite a bit.

TLB: Were you ever stuck in you house for awhile, or anything like that?

EVS: I can't remember that. I can say that with the water, we got pushed out of our houses sometimes. We lived in 15th Street, at a neighbor's who was gone. We lived in there house for about three weeks in the spring time, sometimes. We didn't have sump pumps. We had an outhouse there. We didn't have toilets, and we didn't have water or sewer. Then 22nd Street got water long before we did. We had water taken from 22nd Street brought to our house. We had water for awhile, before that we had a washing machine, but no ringer. So that was one of my jobs, on Monday morning was to turn this one by crank by hand on a pole. We had a hand pump in the basement. That is all the water that we had in the house.

TLB: So you had to go down to the basement, and bring water up.

EVS: We had the washing machine down there. We would get the pump, and then put it in the washing machine, and things like that.

TLB: Lots of work.

EVS: It was a lot of work. I turned that ringer, and that was a job. We were all kids and we turned that ringer all the time.

TLB: That was just one of your chores.

EVS: Everything was hung outdoors then. They put all the clothes out on the clothes line.

TLB: Even in the winter?

EVS: Oh yes.

GVS: Yes, and they would freeze. The long underwear, and everything. It would be out there blowing in the breeze [laughter].

TLB: The frozen clothes could spook you.

GVS: It was very cold on your hands, to take that frozen stuff down to take it in the house.

TLB: But it did get dry, somehow? I can't imagine it getting dry if you hang it out in the winter.

GVS: We would drape them over a table or something.

TLB: And let them finish off inside. What are some qualities that you see in Holland?

What are some good things about Holland?

EVS: Up until about two years ago, the neighborhoods were a lot better. You go to Grand Rapids, and there is a lot of rough stuff going on. Up until a few years ago, it wasn't that way in Holland. Now with all the Mexicans and Blacks and everything moving in the neighborhoods have become real tough with shooting and what not.

TLB: Some drawbacks to living in Holland would be that the neighborhoods are changing and all that. Are you involved with the Church?

EVS: I am a member of the Church, but that is it. At one time I was a deacon years and years ago, but I don't do that anymore.

TLB: What do you think about how the Church and Holland interact? Do you think that the church has a lot of influence on Holland?

EVS: Yes, I think that it does. One of the things that it has an influence on is Family Fare. They are talking about opening on Sunday, and the Church is pushing them not to do it. I don't know if they are going to go through with it or not. That is one of the things, like Thrifty-Acres did it.

TLB: Have you noticed that that has changed? Does the church have less of an influence?

EVS: A few years ago, they would have never gotten away with it. Now the change is that they are even thinking about it. That much change, it is loosening up.

TLB: Do you think that there is still a lot of influence of the Dutch in Holland?

EVS: Yes, there is. Especially on Windmill Island, and things like that. When they have the parades and so on. That is where you see the influence mostly.

TLB: Have you noticed how Tulip Time has changed? What was Tulip Time like when it first got started?

EVS: It was really small. They had parades and everything like that too. Ms. Lida Rogers, a school teacher started that whole thing. I can remember that way back then it was a big occasion when they had those parades downtown. It was quite a story. It has lost its interest a bit. The parades are big and all, but it isn't like it used to be. It doesn't seem to have as much interest.

TLB: Was it a bigger thing for you earlier, Tulip Time?

EVS: We had relatives come from out of town to visit us, and all that. We live on 13th Street, right where the tulips were, and all that activity. We had a lot more influence on than we do now, way out here.

TLB: Where there any problems that the citizens of Holland had to deal with during the time of World War II, or after?

EVS: I don't know. Now it would be with the inner city, and the houses, but I don't think of anything.

TLB: Has there ever been a disagreement about something, or a controversy?

EVS: What was it about? When Nelson Bosman was Mayor, what was going on then? It

was something or other, but I forget what it was.

GVS: I don't remember.

EVS: I can't think of it off hand. Just before that time, there was a controversy, but then he came in and smoothed everything over.

TLB: Can you tell me about one job that you've had, or task for you work that you've enjoyed doing?

EVS: I was in the heating business all me life. The last few years, I did maintenance. But otherwise most of the time it was furnace work, and heating.

TLB: What year did you retire?

EVS: 1974.

GVS: No, 1975, because I was working at Lear Sigler in Grand Rapids. I had to retire in at the age of 65. That was it.

TLB: What did you do in Grand Rapids?

GVS: Secretary.

TLB: Did you work when you raising you children, or did you stay home with the children?

EVS: We had a babysitter. You worked when the kids where small, she worked in a shoe factory, in the office there. And she worked in a bank, First National Bank. And Dekker, in Zeeland, a lawyer.

GVS: I graduated one week, and went to work at the Holland Furnace Company the next. I worked there, until I married Ed.

TLB: Because you were married they didn't want you?

EVS: Yes, because she was married to a competitor.

TLB: I see.

EVS: Then she worked for Cook for Zeeland. She had a lot of different jobs.

GVS: The bank in Zeeland too. FMB.

EVS: Oh yes.

TLB: I think that that is pretty amazing because a lot of women didn't work at all and they stayed home with their kids. That has changed a lot.

GVS: What really changed it for us, was that our daughter had polio. There was no polio foundation. She was at Mayo's, and then she was in Grand Rapids at Mary Freebed for a year, just short of a year. So we had a lot of expenses. I had to work, and we were living with mother, my father had just died. She took care of our daughter.

TLB: What do you think about the increase in industry in Holland?

EVS: It is a good one. I like that. The city helped these people get these new industries in there, because they really "beef" the town up. All these people work, and that brings extra money in. All these new houses north of town here, that is all from the industry. People come in like that.

TLB: Do you think that Holland is growing at a good rate, or do you think that it is growing too fast or slow?

EVS: It is growing fast, but I don't know if it is too fast. It really is.

TLB: Is that one of the changes in Holland?

EVS: Yes.

TLB: Do you think that there is anything that can be done to help the other cultures that are coming into Holland to work together to make less of a problem for the community?

EVS: I don't know what you could do. When she came in, Scots, English, and Irish came in. It was real Dutch at that time, years, and years ago. It is quite a thing to get adjusted to that. They would only tolerate her around.

TLB: Really even somebody who was from another part of Europe, the Dutch had to take time to accept that?

EVS: I don't know what it is like now.

GVS: I was an English, Scottish, and Irish mixture. I was the odd one in school.

TLB: You were the one person without a "V" name, right?

EVS: On the Dennison family part, they have their genealogy way back to 1500. We started working on our family, but it is hard to get all that information. It would be interesting to get all that genealogy.

TLB: You can go to the Archives, and have your genealogy done, if you have Dutch heritage.

EVS: A friend of ours, Betty Thompson, she goes to these Mormon churches. They have all this information on computer. The one in Holland doesn't have much, but some do. [tape flips]

TLB: Did you parents ever talk about what it was like when they first came to Holland?

GVS: They called us all "odd-people." They called us Americans. There were a lot of Americans. J.J. Diekema, he used to be the ambassador to the Netherlands. He built that great big white colonial house next to Third Reformed Church on 12th street. I took care of their grandchildren, one summer down at Macatawa Park. I used to wait on tables and help her when she had company. I very definitely remember all those

strange people that they had come over for various meetings and what not.

TLB: Who were the strange people?

GVS: From Arabia, England, Denmark, Germany, and places like that.

TLB: Because he was the ambassador?

GVS: It was interesting, and I was between my junior and senior year in high school, so I knew what I was seeing. It was interesting.

TLB: Why were they coming to visit?

GVS: Because he was the ambassador to the Netherlands, and they had different meetings. And some of them were personal friends of his too. They had lots of people, and a lot of Americans here too at the house for there meetings.

EVS: We should talk about the Depression in Holland. That was a tough time in Holland.

TLB: I was going to ask you about it.

EVS: We had it good, we repaired furnaces. These people had to have that done, they couldn't buy a new furnace. They could have repairs done. We really had it good in the Depression. We did a lot of work. The heating business is a feast or famine business, it is busy from the first of September to Christmas sometime. Then from Christmas to spring it is very slow. Except for some new houses going up, but if people need repairs, they won't do it if they don't have to. They will wait until spring. That is a part of it. We had it good. Strawberries were forty cents a crate.

TLB: A crate?

EVS: Yes, a crate, and that includes the boxes too. You say, "How could they do that?" I don't know, but they did. We did a lot of bartering. This place down by New

Richmond, a fella built a new house, but he couldn't pay for it. So we took all his firewood, he had a lot of fire wood. So that winter we burned his firewood in our house rather than the coal. We did that back and forth like that, bartering.

Another thing we had was the milk man. They would sell milk tickets, then he would come everyday. On Saturday, you would buy tickets from him, about 60 tickets, each ticket was for a pint. One day you put the tickets there, and then the next day he would bring the amount of milk that you want. We did a lot of business with the milkman by bartering. We would get a lot of tickets in exchange for money. During the Depression we did a lot of that.

TLB: So if one person had chickens, and somebody else had milk, you could trade back and forth?

EVS: People didn't have a lot of money to do it, but they had stuff that they could sell like that. If they had a lot of cherries, they could put those out, or strawberries, or apples. A lot of the bartering.

TLB: Have you been involved in any organizations in Holland?

EVS: Not really, no.

TLB: What were some of the things that you did while you were a deacon in the church?

EVS: Collect money was the biggest thing. And I did some calling, but that was not that big of a job. The elders did most of the calling. The big thing we would do is on Sundays we would pick up these tapes and bring them to different places for these people who were "shut-in." That was quite interesting to visit these people. This was the only time somebody would come visit them, was on Sunday. It was really

interesting to talk to people like that. If somebody came in from the outside, they were anxious to talk. We spent a lot more time doing that than we should of, but we enjoyed it and so did they.

TLB: Can you talk a little bit about when you met each other, and when you decided to get married?

EVS: We met each other at Centennial Park. The American Legion had a band every Tuesday night. I met here that way.

GVS: He was there with a friend of his, and I was there with a friend of mine. He brought this girl home, and so I brought her home. That is how we got started.

TLB: Did the other two people get together too?

EVS: No.

TLB: It didn't work out for them [laughter].

GVS: That was a big thing, that band concert on Tuesday nights.

EVS: Oh yes!

GVS: Everybody went to that. You have heard of John Vander Sluis? He did the singing. It was great.

EVS: Marguerite Van Vyven's brother and father did too. He was the song leader for Third Church.

TLB: What were some other things that you did for fun at that age?

EVS: I was messing with amateur radios a lot then. I did a lot of messing around with that. I spent a lot of time with that. I never did anything more with it. That time, we used a lot of time to build them and so forth. A bunch of girls would get together

and once a week they would have a party to chew the fat.

GVS: We were sewing. They all got so mad at me, because I wanted to be a secretary. I was studying, I was practicing shorthand all of the time. I didn't sew that much.

TLB: So you were practicing, instead of sewing.

GVS: But we had a good time.

TLB: Can you talk about how the role of women has changed? What women do now, as compared to earlier? [Interviewee does not hear the question correctly.]

EVS: You mean as in factories coming in?

TLB: Factories or what do women do in Holland now, that they didn't do before?

EVS: I'm not sure what you mean. Piano factories came in and out. Bush and Lane, Holland and Baker Furniture, Holland Furnace. BASF has that office building.

GVS: Heinz.

EVS: Yes, Heinz was always a big one. When I was in high school, Heinz used to have a farm on East Eighth Street. They would have different varieties of pickles that they would grow. We would pick those as kids after school and on Saturdays for fifteen cents an hour. They would try to find which were the best growing pickles. They would then recommend to the farmers what to do with them. They raised a lot of dill there. There were these bushes that came way up, I don't know if you ever saw dill.

TLB: Can you think of any other changes that have happened in Holland? Or do you have any other stories of what early life in Holland was like?

GVS: The Holland Furnace Company was a big leader in Holland.

EVS: Yes, that was a big leader. Whatever they said went through.

TLB: What do you think of the Prince company as you have seen them grow up?

EVS: They have been growing, and growing, and growing. She knew the Prince, when they were kids.

GVS: His mother, and her family, her sister were all friends of ours. I lived on 13th Street, right in the parking lot of where the library is now. This family had a daughter that married a Prince, they lived right across the street from us in a little house up on the hill. That is where he grew up.

EVS: He brought a lot of industry to Holland, Ed Prince. Some people don't like him, but we have always had good luck with him. He was a big supporter of Central Park Chapel. It is just a summer church. Van Andel did to. Before they had a lot of different ones in there helping support it. Zoot was in there. But Prince did a lot to support that. You know where Central Park Grocery store is, it is about three blocks west, and a block north towards the water. It is not a big place, but a nice size. Years ago, they had it full all the time. The last few years, it has been going downhill. This past year they put another whole building out there, with a toilet, and everything.

GVS: And there is a Sunday school.

EVS: We had a mistake last week. A lady friend of ours called us up and said that Bob Voskul, a pastor we used to have at Third Church from Hope College, was going to preach at Central Park Church. But she meant Central Park Chapel. So we went to one place, and she went to another place. We met up afterwards.

TLB: I don't really have anymore questions. Do you have anything that you want to add

about the city of Holland, or your life? That is a lot to cover in a very little time.

Do you have any special memories?

EVS: I don't know off-hand what to say.

GVS: My special memories are of the streetcar, it went right in front of our house. It came down Eighth Street from Grand Rapids, and turned where the Tower Clock is on River. It came down to 13th and then went west to the Sugar Beet Factory out there. Then it turned and went out 16th, out to Macatawa.

TLB: What did the streetcar look like? It carried mostly people around, right?

EVS: And some freight.

GVS: It looked just like this [pointing to model streetcar].

TLB: The little yellow car. Is this the streetcar that your father worked for?

GVS: Yes, the electric one.

TLB: Do you remember when they took it out?

EVS: These friends of ours live on 15th and Harrison. The streetcar would come around by 16th Street, from Harrison to 16th Street on those sharp curves. Every once and awhile it would jump the track. Boy what a time it was to get that thing back on.

TLB: I bet.

EVS: The streetcar came down Eighth Street, but the passengers went down River Avenue, and the boat train and the freight cars went straight down Eighth Street on Washington and Eighth to where the boat dock is now. On Sunday night, they would have this special train of cars, with people from Grand Rapids. These people would come non-stop from Grand Rapids to Holland, then they would get on the boat, and

take the boat to Chicago. That was quite a thing to see, that boat train, it went so fast. It was a speeding thing.

GVS: We called it the midnight flier. But it did not go at midnight, and it was not a flier.

TLB: Did anybody have trouble with people coming in to Holland?

EVS: No, the big problem that we had with the streetcar is that it would hit and kill these cows. The cows would get on the track, and by the time the car got there they couldn't get off. That killed a lot of them. That was a big controversy, about killing cows and pigs. If the fence wasn't good, and they could crawl through, they would get through there. It went straight east of Zeeland to Port Grove station, and then it went on a slant to Jenison, and then it went on to Grand Rapids. In Grand Rapids, they had five of these electric railroads come together at one station. The ones from Muskegon didn't; they didn't belong to that association so they had three separate stations on Alpine Avenue, where there is an Arnie Bakery now. That used to be the railway station for Muskegon. All the others came to that one place. In the summer time, we would be there and we had to wait for cars. All these different people from different cities would all be in the same waiting room, right downtown Grand Rapids. They would leave from there, and all go there separate ways.

Some trains would have a third rails. They have a track, and then they have another rail up here, and that is where the electricity is. They go across. This fair would have trollies. They only had wired. The cattle would run into it and get killed. When they came up to an intersection, they would stop the third rail. Then it would coast across there, and then it would pick it up again.

The railway had a funny thing about. When the kids were young, we would get a on at 16th Street at Ottawa Avenue, they had a waiting room there. We would go to Macatawa Park on that thing. We walked there from our house, rather than to go downtown to pay five cents extra to take the train.

TLB: Do you remember what Macatawa Park was like then?

EVS: It was exclusive, but you could go in there. Around 1923 - 1924, they had a lot of trouble with fires there. It burnt a lot of cottages, until they put that watering system on like that. She worked up there at Macatawa Park years ago.

GVS: Up there on the hills that overlooked Macatawa, and Lake Michigan.

EVS: Perry Circle.

TLB: Sounds pretty.

GVS: It was.

EVS: Then south of Macatawa, there was another hotel, I can't remember the name, when we where kids. They had a cable there. The cable went about a block long, and then sloped down until it was about fifty feet high to little more that nothing. We would come along with barrel straps, put around that, then hang on them, and take a ride down. It was a thrilling ride with your feet up in the air just hanging on that thing. That barrel stay would wear off after awhile, and you'd let go of it go for a whip-to-do. I can't remember the name of that hotel that was on the south-side of Macatawa Park. A lot of people went there in the summer time just to visit.

GVS: There was a church way up there too. They had an incline railway there.

TLB: To go up to the church.

GVS: Yes.

TLB: Neat.

GVS: It was an open air church; they used it only in the summer. The cable car going up, they called in "Angel's Flight."

TLB: Going up to the church, I guess that makes sense. I think that that is it. If there is anything that you want to add that come up later let me know. [Informs interviewees of transcription process.]

EVS: Do you have anything to add right now?

GVS: I was enjoying you telling it.

EVS: It is quite a story about the Depression. We even bartered a furnace, and got a car in Hamilton that time. I think it was \$300 - \$400 for a car at that time. It was real cheap. Put a furnace in for a man there, and paid the difference in cash.

TLB: I heard that a lot of people did either really well during the Depression, or they suffered a lot, but there wasn't a lot of in-between.

EVS: That is right. And they had the bank failures then too. Before the bank failed, you could only get so much money until they finally closed out. But then everything was closed out. That was a big lose, a lot of people lost there money on that.

TLB: What about "blue laws" changed at all?

EVS: No, I don't know.

TLB: What about Prohibition?

EVS: You couldn't buy liquor, but we didn't want it anyway. My folks would make root beer themselves by a root beer extract. We took it on a boat. It was the Fourth of

July and it was hot. The boat had a propeller that made the boat vibrate. All the pop would bounce around. Everybody pointed their finger, but it was only root beer. But the pressure built up so much that it blew the tops right off. It was quite a mess, but there were also a lot of people laughing.

TLB: I bet.

GVS: Jenison Park was a park that was owned by the Interurban. The Interurban came from Grand Rapids to Holland. All these big furniture companies would have their picnics at Jenison Park. There would be a whole stream eight, ten, twelve of them sometimes of those street cars on their way there, right past this house. They came right behind those woods there, and right behind that house. [points across the street]

EVS: For tourists, they had special railway cars. The seats for the whole length of the car allowed the people to look out. They went down the street with everybody waving and hollering at them.

GVS: That was a big deal.

EVS: They had what they called a figure eight. It was one of these cars that go around the track way up high, and then go "zoop" like that down at Jenison Park. And they had shooting galleries, and meeting places.

GVS: They had merry-go-rounds.

TLB: So it was an amusement park.

EVS: That is all it was, it was an amusement park. Those are some of the things that happened years and years ago.

GVS: If you think about them as the good old days, they were in many ways. They were

hard, but they were good. [offers licorice] When Ed, and I were going together I liked chocolate very much too, but it was licorice that I really liked. I still do.

TLB: It is good. Most of your family lives in the area then.

EVS: Yes.

GVS: Mine doesn't. My brothers all live away.

[Discussion on interviewer's history and the Van Spyker family.]

GVS: Oh, I was going to tell you about the licorice. Before we were married, Ed lived on Cherry Street. He came down Central Avenue, you know where that Antique Store is now?

EVS: 16th and Central.

TLB: Yes.

GVS: It used to be a drugstore. The man made the best hot fudge in town. He had licorice at the drugstore. Here Ed would come, and everybody would laugh at us. They would say, "Here comes the big spender." It was a penny for a big stick. He would come with a brown bag just full of them.

TLB: Instead of getting roses, you got licorice.

GVS: Yes, but only it suited me. It tasted so good.

TLB: Have drugstores changed in that respect? Was your favorite place to go to get sweets a drugstore?

GVS: Either there, or the Fabiano on Eighth Street. They had a big ice cream parlor, with fruit: oranges and bananas. One of the Fabiano boys has the Peanut Store now.

TLB: That is my favorite store to go to downtown.

GVS: Ours too. It still is.

TLB: That is one thing that I have noticed with Holland. Things really stay with the family. People continue the family tradition.

GVS: Yes.

TLB: That is unique, because it is not always that way.

GVS: No it isn't.

[Discussion on the Archives.]

TLB: Do you remember the Getz Zoo? What was that like?

EVS: That was real interesting.

GVS: That was wonderful.

EVS: That was a big highlight to go every year, that was really something.

TLB: That is one thing that I found amazing.

EVS: I forgot about that.

GVS: It was.

TLB: I wouldn't expect to have that in Holland. Do you remember what they did with the animals, when it ended?

EVS: No, I don't remember what they did with them.

GVS: I don't know, but probably Chicago because he came from Chicago.

TLB: They probably just sent them to other zoos.

EVS: He was a railway man. He invented the Pullman car, and that is how he made the money.

TLB: So he had the money, and the way to get the animals here. Very interesting.

[Discussion about how interviewer choose Hope College.]

TLB: Do you notice any changes that stand out in Hope College at all?

GVS: It is so much bigger!

EVS: Yes. And they started the chimes again.

TLB: Yes, I like that.

GVS: I do too.

EVS: And they are putting up that big building on 10th Street, that Haworth building. Boy,
oh boy, oh boy.

TLB: It is going to be huge, but we need it. It has grown.

[Discussion of information in the Archives.]

TLB: It is a good community.

GVS: We think so. We have seen so many changes. Every once and awhile we will say,
"Oh, it used to be so much nicer." You could walk all the way downtown at night,
and you wouldn't think of doing that anymore.

TLB: I think that sometimes we have to realize that is changing everywhere.

GVS: Everywhere, that is true. It isn't just here.

[Discussion about Interviewer's home.]

EVS: Yesterday or the day before, these two kids had their bikes in the front yard stolen.
Somebody came and stole their bikes right from their lawn.

TLB: Yes, bike theft is a problem in Holland.

EVS: The police department doesn't help. If you bring a stolen bike to the police
department they keep it, they won't give it back. Then they have an auction, and

make all that profit on that.

TLB: I always register my bike with the police department, so hopefully if it is stolen I will get it back.

EVS: When we lived by the library, the kids would leave their bikes there, and get their bikes stolen quite a few times. When we tried to help them get their bikes back, we couldn't do it.

TLB: Okay, thank you.

[End of interview]